

CAREERS

Stephanie Howarth: 'I hungered to create a new culture'

Mad Radish co-founder looks back on her time with DavidsTea and discusses what makes her current venture stand apart

CYNTHIA MARTIN

THE LADDER

Stephanie Howarth, 41, is co-founder with David Segal of DavidsTea of the Mad Radish chain of Canadian fast casual restaurants. There are now three locations in Ottawa and one in Toronto.

I grew up in Knowlton, a small Quebec town, quite poor, my mom a single mother working at difficult low-paying jobs. We grew up financially insecure. It instilled a strong desire to be financially independent, to take care of myself. I was very excited to move to Montreal at 17 for CEGEP at Dawson College.

I started working at 19 in McGill University's bookstore. I was nervous, didn't have a sense of my worth or capabilities. I quickly realized I loved recommending books, in the service of a wonderful product, making people happy. That created a spark inside me. I worked in offices, administration, customer care and client management in freight forwarding – 10 years learning how to operate in a business.

Coming off my second maternity leave, I worked 40 hours a week in event planning and catering, then nights and weekends overseeing events. It wasn't sustainable. In 2008 at 30, it was time to demand more from myself professionally.

Tea was a tradition in my family, 3 p.m. every day with my British grandmother. She was influential, editor of the local paper in her 70s and 80s, so intelligent and egalitarian, she held me to high standards.

David posted a Craigslist ad, "Young entrepreneur is starting a tea company. Needs executive assistant." I thought, "Nana would get a kick out of this;" she had died a few months before. Working with a noble product is a privilege, I might not have applied for "Entrepreneur starting paper company." Meeting David was alchemy. I knew it was going to be successful, the right time for that product and brand.

I was the first DavidsTea employee. We built a team of young people, the early days were a meritocracy. In a small business, you're wearing different hats and learning. They gave me opportunities to explore functions in buying, sales, operations. I'd always been creative, social and enjoyed social commentary and debate – that led to marketing. Working in that startup environment allowed me to gain business acumen – trial and error in some cases – with phenomenal mentors.

One CEO, Jevin Eagle, said, "You're getting an MBA." But as a single parent – not to say they



DAVE CHAN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

can't work full-time, raise kids and get an MBA – I felt it would compromise me.

A company transitioning to a public company goes through big changes. I hungered to create a new culture more closely aligned with my values, creating phenomenal customer experience, a great product and growth, providing opportunities to people. I left in May, 2016, David left a few months prior; he asked if I wanted to work with him. Now I get to work at a high level toward something I believe in.

A delicious salad is a treat. People used to think it was like medicine: You'd been bad, hadn't been eating right, were on a diet. The advent of bowls is fairly new; wave one was explaining salad shops, now we're differentiating. We have dishes with almost no greens. We've built a crave-worthy menu, comfort in a bowl.



We source local food in season, 100 per cent; it makes good business, it's the most affordable, freshest and tastes best.

STEPHANIE HOWARTH
CO-FOUNDER, MAD RADISH

Mad Radish is demonstrating mad passion for ingredients. We source local food in season, 100 per cent; it makes good business, it's the most affordable, freshest and tastes best. We're not creating unnecessary waste, we only use plant-based compostable packaging. We're cashless and trashless.

We're looking for real estate opportunities. In 2019, we want to open three to five stores, 2020 be at 10 or more. Companies have a responsibility to support communities they operate in. We donate a serving of fresh produce to the Community Food Centres Canada per order on our app. Since we opened, 27,543 portions [as of Nov. 21].

My greatest responsibility is to create a strong, high-functioning team so everyone can perform well. I assume positive intent, that most people are trying to do the right thing, build something they're proud of.

This is my culmination of hard work, honing skills, building relationships, bringing an important product to market. I don't say "lucky." Women say that all the time. I was in the right place at the right time. I chose to walk through the door.

Special to The Globe and Mail

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Five strategies to help ensure top performers don't jump ship

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

OPINION

Leadership speaker and consultant, Founder of Turning Managers Into Leaders

Depending on your industry or market sector, employee turnover may be a fact of life, but have you noticed that when employees leave, it's never the lousy ones that jump ship? The unfortunate reality is that the ones who are most likely to leave are the ones who are in greatest demand elsewhere. And of course, those are usually your best and your brightest.

So what are you doing to ensure that your top employees want to stay in your organization? What are you doing to engage them so that your company is their employer of choice? If the answer is "nothing," then you're putting yourself at a serious competitive advantage. Because you can bet that those who are departing are going to organizations that have taken concrete steps to entice and engage them.

And just in case you're wondering, the answer to employee engagement is not "money." Let's be clear though: Fair pay is a baseline expectation. If you're paying less than the going rate, then your best people will become disillusioned. But if you're paying fairly (and your employees view it as so), then giving them more money isn't going to engage them. It is other, more intrinsic factors that will make your people feel like they have interesting and fulfilling work, and that will give them a sense of achievement. While certainly not an exhaustive list, here are five proven ideas to stop your finest from fleeing to what they see as greener pastures.

EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE TO ACT

Top employees want to be valued for their knowledge and expertise. They want to be able to take an assignment, run with it, make decisions and act. That is impossible if you are a micro-manager! Good leaders know that there is a balance between providing direction and dictating every minor detail. A reasonable approach is to offer some guidance at the beginning, such as required length or size, deadline or other specifics and then checking in with employees along the way to see how things are progressing. And, only if the employee is stuck, should you then provide pointers.

PRAISE MORE OFTEN

The reality is that most leaders don't praise enough. Not because they don't intend to, but only because they never seem to get around to it. Recognition has been proven to be a powerful intrinsic motivator, and praise is the easiest and least expensive form of recognition there is. Keep in mind that as long as praise is specific and sincere, it can never be overdone. In particular, specificity makes praise more meaningful and effective. So, praise more often.

FOSTER TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Open, responsive, two-way communication is vital to employee retention. If you look at the companies that are known to have high employee engagement and low turnover, you will note that they put considerable effort into communicating with their employees through a variety of vehicles including employee surveys, regularly scheduled meetings, formal postings and newsletters, and one-on-one discussions. They also give their people opportunities to speak their minds, without any negative repercussions.

REDUCE PERCEIVED BUREAUCRACY

As much as you are able, eliminate red tape. Even if you work in a large organization that is mired in bureaucracy, don't underestimate what you can do. True, you may not be able to get rid of seemingly endless policies and procedures, but you can buffer your people from them. Look for opportunities to be flexible in the application of rules. Take on paperwork and bureaucratic activities yourself and don't pass them on to your staff.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND GROW

When you invest resources into training your employees, it is a visible and powerful indicator of the worth you place in your people. When you give your employees opportunities to learn new skills, it keeps them interested and excited. Training and professional development initiatives lead to better career prospects, which encourages your people to see a future with your organization. Employees who are given opportunities to learn and grow, both through formal and informal means, are inspired to make longer-term commitments to their workplaces.



FILM COMMISSIONER AND DIRECTOR, ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES

As Canada's largest city and fourth largest in North America, Toronto is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture. Business prosperity and a vibrant creative world are hallmarks of a great city.

At the City of Toronto, the Economic Development and Culture Division provides services that contribute to an economically strong, highly liveable and culturally vibrant city. Reporting to the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, the Film Commissioner and Director, Entertainment Industries will champion the City's support for film, television, digital media, music and selected special event and tourism activities by leading a high functioning, diverse team. S/he will do this by providing advice and advocating on effective strategies and policies to promote Toronto as a globally competitive centre for screen-based industries and by helping nurture the growth of these industries along with music, tourism and special events. In addition to overseeing a number of important service delivery functions, the Commissioner/Director will advise the Mayor, City

Council, and key City leadership staff on priorities and issues impacting the health and future of Toronto's Entertainment Industries.

For this highly visible and pivotal revenue-generating position, you have credibility in the film and television industries (additional experience in any of the other components of the Entertainment Industries would be appreciated) to serve as an invaluable partner to major players such as the Toronto Film, Television and Digital Media Board, Film Ontario, Toronto Music Advisory Council, Tourism Toronto and other key stakeholders in the private and public sectors. Leveraging existing relationships with decision makers in multiple sectors and expert use of social media, you will attract and assist commercially oriented productions and events, and create positive buzz for the City, its public spaces and its screen and music-based entertainment infrastructure. A customer service orientated leader, you are an adept manager of people and budgets, and experienced in strategic and operational planning.

The City of Toronto is committed to fostering an inclusive, accessible environment, where all employees and members of the public feel valued, respected and supported. We are dedicated to building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the public and communities in which we live and serve. If you are an individual who requires accommodation to apply for this position, due to disability under the Ontario Human Rights Code, a request for accommodation will be accepted as part of the City's hiring process. The City is committed to providing Code-protected accommodation throughout its hiring process. Please visit *Hiring Policies and Statements* for further details.

Consideration of candidates will begin immediately. To be considered, please submit your cover letter, resume and related information online at www.odgersberndtson.com/en/careers/15210 by December 19, 2018. For further information, please contact Nancy Lismer in our Toronto office by email at nancy.lismer@odgersberndtson.com.